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ABSTRACT

In 1976, small special sections of English A (basic composition) were initiated within the English Department of the University of California at Davis to teach university-level writing skills to students in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), seventy-five per cent of whom speak English as a second language. This paper describes the design and implementation of the program and discusses the findings of a linguistic analysis that was conducted during the first quarter of the program. The study focuses on the following points: (1) identifying specific writing problems of students in EOP sections, particularly those problems that tend to disappear during ten weeks of intensive instruction and those that do not; (2) comparing the performances of students in EOP sections of English A with those of students in regular sections; (3) determining the relationship of writing errors to the first language, that is, the degree to which a student's first language or dialect interferes with his attempts to master standard English writing skills. The paper also includes statistical tables, a discussion of the results and a copy of the "Linguistic Errata Form Categories."
(Author/AMH)

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A STUDY OF WRITING PROBLEMS IN A REMEDIAL WRITING PROGRAM FOR EOP STUDENTS

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An increasing number of students enter college each year with deficiencies in the writing skills necessary for successful academic work. On campuses of the University of California, these students are required to take a basic writing course called Subject A or English A. On the Davis campus at the present time, the number of students being held for English A represents well over half of all incoming freshmen. Within this large percentage is a group of students in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) who arrive with particularly acute deficiencies in basic writing skills. These students are from low income backgrounds, and because many of them learned a first language or dialect other than standard English, they enroll in English A with problems not only in written English, but also in oral English. Conventional English A sections, usually taught by graduate students, are not designed to provide the specialized and intensive language training needed by the majority of students in EOP. Consequently in 1976, the English Department at UC Davis was requested to submit a program proposal to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs outlining a concentrated approach for teaching writing skills to students in EOP. This proposal was subsequently funded, and the program began in the fall quarter of that year.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

FL009372

In Fall quarter, 1976, eleven small sections of English A were set up on the Davis campus to provide an intensive program in remedial writing for seventy-four students in EOP. Instructors were selected for the program who had the training and experience necessary to provide specialized help for students with severe language problems. Since the EOP sections were smaller than the usual English A sections, classroom instruction was highly individualized and tutorial conferences with instructors were frequent. Additionally, students in the EOP sections were encouraged to make use of developmental reading and vocabulary workshops available at the Learning Assistance Center. Course content addressed primarily rhetoric, sentence structure, and grammar, with particular attention to problems with English as a second language or dialect; teaching methods and materials varied with instructor, according to the needs of the particular group of students in each section.

Three criteria determined student enrollment in the EOP sections: membership in EOP, enrollment in English A, and availability during one of the scheduled class periods. No attempts were made to group students by proficiency level, first language, or ethnicity. The resulting sections had an average enrollment of 6.7 students, ranging from a low of 4 to a high of 10 students in a section.

Also included in the fall program was a pilot study[1], which was primarily a linguistic analysis of writing problems of students in EOP. Two regular sections of English A, comprising forty-six students, were selected to serve as a comparison group in the study. While peer tutoring was available to these forty-six students, no systematic effort was made to provide individual assistance from instructors.

The profile of students in the eleven EOP sections was markedly different from that of students in the two regular sections of English A. Academically, the students in the regular sections had a superior high school grade point average (3.60 vs. 3.20 for students in the EOP sections) and a significantly higher average score on the Verbal part of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, SAT-V (485 vs. 395). Only 2% of the students in the regular sections were admitted to the University by special action, whereas 43% of the students in the EOP sections were admitted under special action criteria.

A similar differentiation is evident in ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. An overwhelming majority of the students in the regular sections were from a Caucasian background (86%) and spoke English as their first language (93%). Students in the EOP sections, on the other hand, were predominantly non-Caucasian (83%) and spoke a first language other than standard English (66%): approximately one-third spoke a Latin language, mostly Spanish; the remainder spoke either Black English[2] (14%), Chinese or Vietnamese (11%),

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[1] Beryl Duffin, instructor in the EOP program in English A, coordinated the pilot study and conducted the linguistic analysis; John Winkworth, Office of Research and Evaluation, was project consultant; and Bonnie Kroll performed the computer programming and analysis.

[2] Although considered a dialect of standard English, Black English is a well-structured linguistic system with many distinctive morphological and syntactic features not found in standard English. Furthermore, the closeness of Black English to standard English serves to increase interference in the problem areas. For these reasons, Black English is considered a separate language in this study.

Japanese or Korean (7%), or a Native American language (3%).

PROGRAM STUDY

Data Collection

The data collected and analyzed for the program study consisted of: 1) scores on an objective grammar test[3], administered to all students at the beginning of the quarter; 2) errors from initial (Essay 1) and final(Essay 11) essays for both groups; and 3) errors from weekly writing assignments (Essays 2-10) for students in the EOP sections. A total of 630 essays, averaging 2 pages per essay and approximately 200 words per page, were examined during the quarter. Because of differences in the length of essays, the primary unit of analysis was the average number of errors per page.

A linguistic errata form (Appendix A), designed specifically for the study, permitted a systematic recording of essay errors. The form contains a breakdown of writing problems into fifty-four functional categories, arranged within nine basic categories: Organization and Focus (i.e., rhetoric), Sentence Structure, Verb Usage, Noun Usage, Pronoun Usage, Prepositional Usage, Article Usage, Word Selection, and Mechanical Conventions. This particular breakdown was based on a study of essays by former Subject A students (mostly native English speakers) and upon two sets of previous linguistic analyses, contrastive and error. The first set (contrastive) included several studies comparing grammatical structures in standard English with those in Black English, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Sioux, and Hopi. These contrastive studies identified possible points of first-language interference, such as differences in verb or preposition/postposition placement in a sentence or differences in plural formation of nouns or tense formation of verbs. Such studies, however, are theoretical in nature, and interference does not always occur in actual

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[3]The objective grammar test has not been a major target in the study, but scores appear to show some reliability as objective indicators of student performance in subsequent writing assignments. For example, students who scored 80% or more on the objective test showed fewer errors with sentence structure and usage and wrote consistently better organized papers than did students with lower scores. In general, students in the non-EOP sections scored higher on the objective test than students in the EOP sections.

speech or writing as predicted by theory. Therefore, the second set of studies (error analyses) used in designing the errata form identified actual errors made by speakers of the several languages in speaking and in writing standard English. The contrastive and error analyses were particularly useful in determining the necessary subdivisions of Usage (i.e., categories 14-42) on the errata form. As designed, the form was used in the present study to identify not only difficulties encountered by the English A population as a whole, but also problems specific to separate language groups.

Areas of Research Emphasis

A. Student Performance in the EOP English A Sections

The major focus of the study was to identify specific writing problems of students in EOP sections. We wanted to know the kinds of problems that tend to disappear (and those which do not) during ten weeks of intensive instruction.

B. Comparative Performances: EOP Sections and Regular Sections

A second research question of interest was a comparison of performance of students in EOP sections with that of students in regular sections. Because of the substantial differential in past educational achievements, students in the regular sections were expected to display fewer writing errors than were students in the EOP sections; as a consequence, the regular sections were expected to have a higher percentage of students passing English A.

C. The Relationship of Writing Errors to First Language

A third area for examination was the degree to which a student's first language or dialect interfered with his attempts to master standard English writing skills. Patterns of direct interference (e.g., misplacement of modifying elements or of articles) or of rule overgeneralization (e.g., overinflection of verbs and nouns) were expected to reveal themselves in an incidence of errors in the usage or morphological categories (14-42) on the errata form. For instance, because of predicted interference, problems with the use of articles were expected to be greater among Japanese and Korean speakers than among students whose first language uses either articles (Black English or the Latin Languages) or pre-noun classifiers (Chinese, Vietnamese, or certain

Native American languages). Also, students whose first language does not attach inflectional affixes to nouns and verbs (e.g., Black English, Oriental languages) were expected to experience greater difficulty in these categories than were students whose first language is morphologically closer to English (e.g., the Latin languages).

Results

A. Student Performance in the EOP Sections

Error occurrence on a total of 544 weekly essays provided the data used to review performance of students in the eleven EOP sections. An analysis of these errors permitted identification of not only writing problems, but also the rate by which the various errors tend to decrease. Ten of the fifty-four categories on the linguistic errata form showed a relatively high number of errors. Four of these categories (1-4) related to Organization and Focus: organization, unity (inclusion of extraneous material), coherence, and development (failure to include supporting material). Two categories (45 and 47) related to Word Selection: diction (narrowly defined as slang or colloquialism) and selection of wrong or inappropriate word; and two (48 and 49) related to Mechanical Conventions: punctuation and spelling. One category (11), construction, related to Sentence Structure; and one category (30), reference, related to Pronoun Usage.

While a high incidence of errors in particular categories was occasionally due to an inclusive nature of a category definition, such incidences more often reflected a frequent occurrence of a specific problem. Sentence construction (11), for example, was one such inclusive category, combining structural problems relating to coordination, subordination, comparison, and inversion (mostly subject/verb inversion in WH-clauses). Spelling (49) and punctuation (48), by contrast, were narrowly defined categories that nonetheless identified high numbers of errors.

Figures 1-9 (pp.7,8) show student progress relative to the nine general categories of errors over the length of the quarter. The following brief analyses highlight particular errors within these nine categories and include representative samples of some of the writing problems observed during the quarter.

1. *Organization and Focus* was the major problem category for students at the beginning of the course. In fact, forty percent of the total average errors during the quarter were attributed to problems in organizing and developing coherent paragraphs and essays. By the end of the quarter, however, students had made remarkable progress in this category, reducing their errors by 83%.
2. In *Sentence Structure*, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices gave students the most problems initially and were somewhat resistant to improvement. (There is some question whether such problems relate more to a lack of understanding punctuation rules than to a basic inability to recognize complete thought patterns.) Errors with fragments decreased by 30% during the quarter, and errors with run-on sentences and comma splices decreased 26%. A number of students who demonstrated improvement early in the quarter reverted at times to fragments and comma splices in later compositions. However, such errors often appeared to be linked to performance, rather than competence (i.e., the errors reflected carelessness or haste rather than a basic lack of knowledge of the rules).
3. *Verb Usage* problems were relatively infrequent in the essays of many students in the EOP sections. The most difficult problems in this category were omission of inflectional suffixes, tense selection, and subject/verb agreement. Errors of inflection omission, as opposed to those of agreement, were related to first language interference.

   Inflection omission: The student who do not have a car compensate by using the bus system. (Black English)

   Subject/verb agreement: The number of vandalisms in my home town are increasing. (English)

4. *Noun Usage* errors were also relatively infrequent. However, certain students for whom English was a second language had considerable difficulty with omission of plural or possessive inflections and confusion between count and mass nouns.

   Inflection omission: A student devotion for his family... (Black English)

   Count/non-count: ...many homeworks...(Korean)
   ...much competitions at UCD...(Japanese)

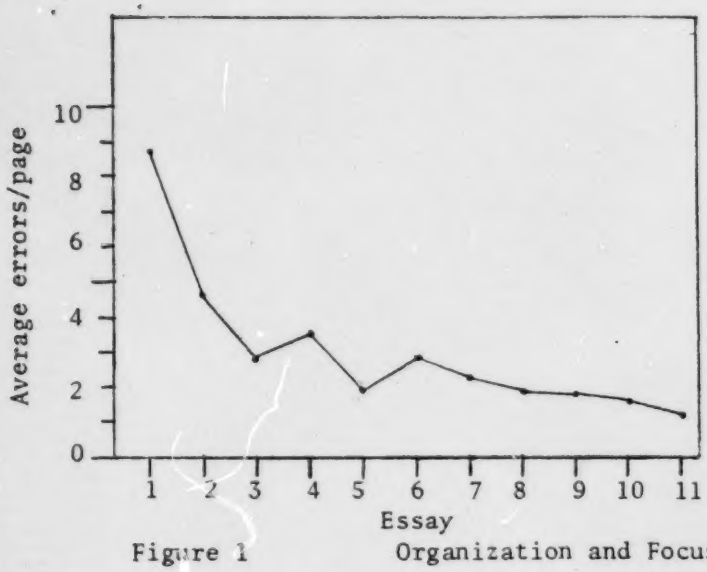

Figure 1 Organization and Focus

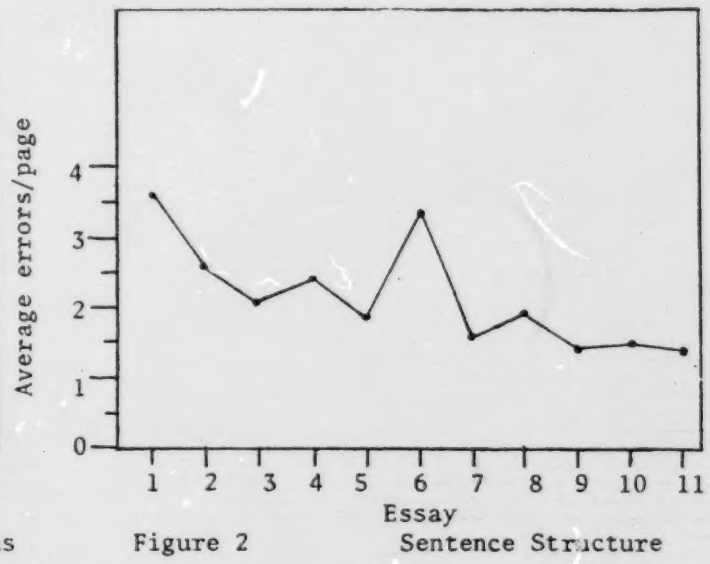

Figure 2 Sentence Structure

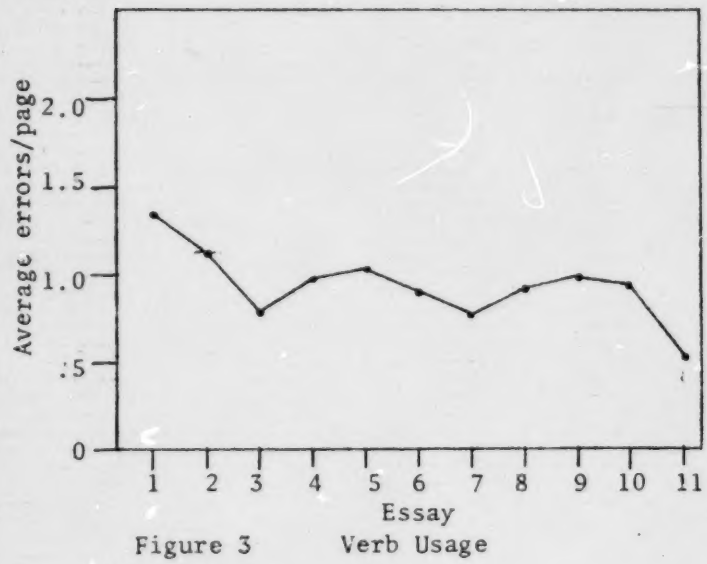

Figure 3 Verb Usage

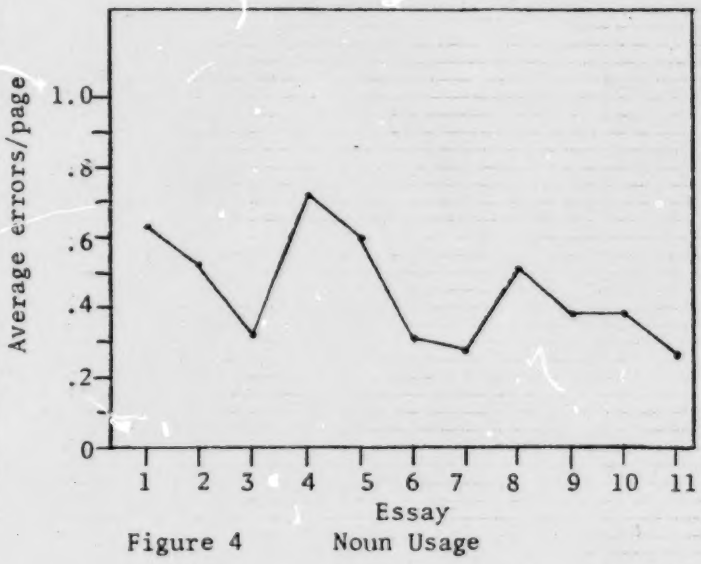

Figure 4 Noun Usage

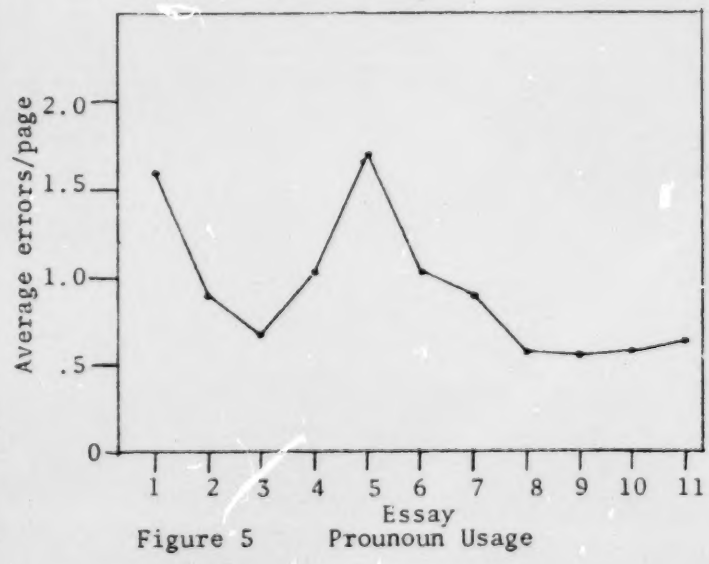

Figure 5 Prounoun Usage

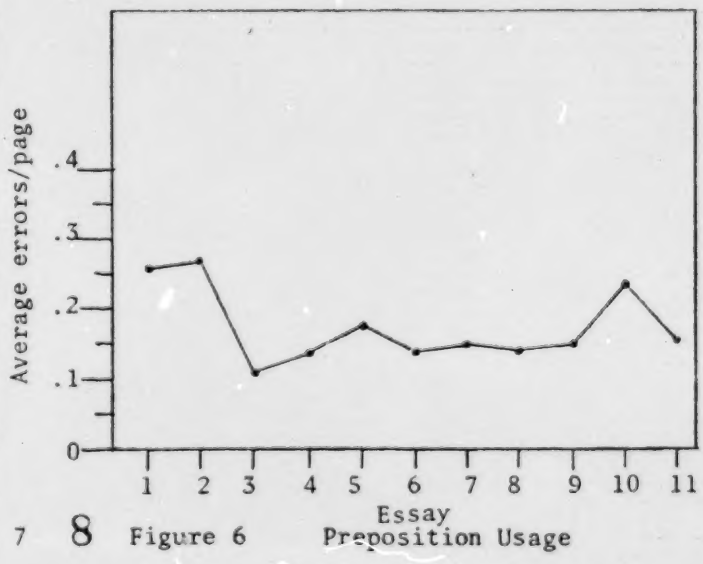

Figure 6 Preposition Usage

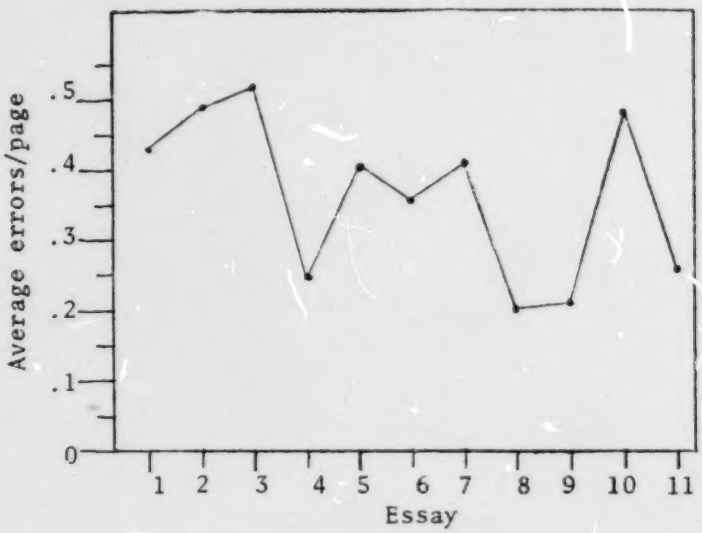

Figure 7 Article Usage

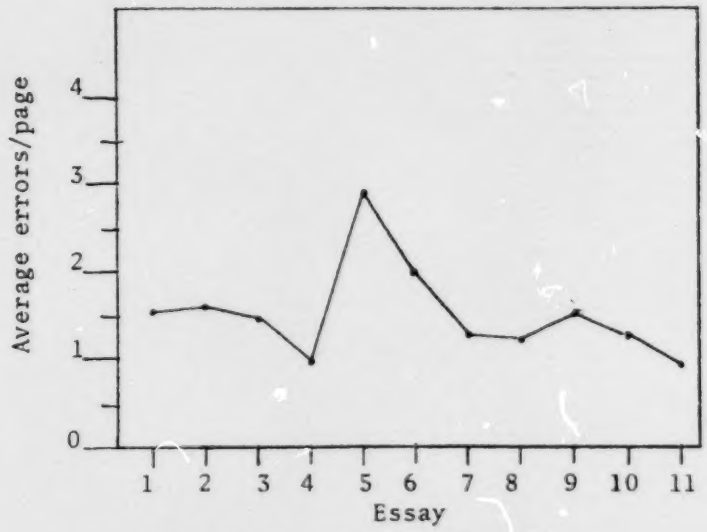

Figure 8 Word Selection

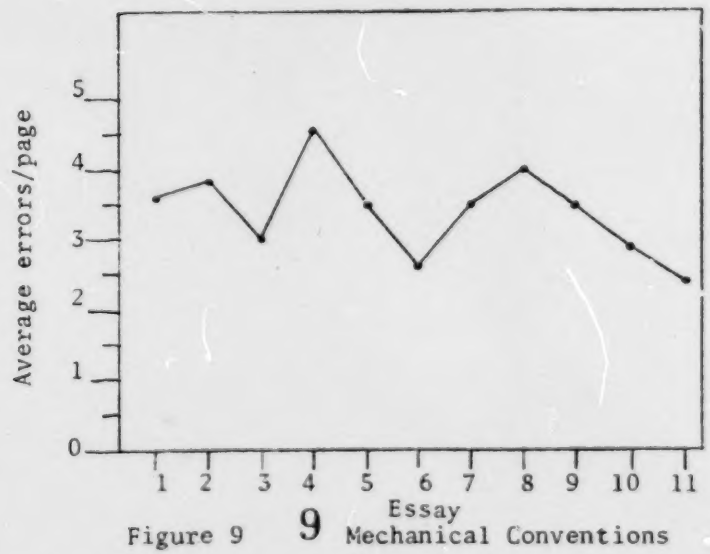

Figure 9 Mechanical Conventions

Inflection omission errors decreased during the quarter by 60%, while noun countability errors decreased by only 22%. The frequency of noun usage problems fluctuated erratically from essay to essay for those students having difficulty.

5. In *Pronoun Usage*, problems with pronoun reference (failure to identify or agree with an antecedent) occurred with high frequency among a majority of the students. The problem, however, decreased more than 60% by the end of the quarter.

6. *Preposition Usage* had the lowest average error rate of the nine error classes under consideration. Errors that were tabulated related almost exclusively to use of English as a second language, with the greatest problem being that of unidiomatic usage.

> The first technological achievement in means of transportation was the automobile. (Japanese)
>
> I hope to fulfill the requirements of majoring into international relations. (Black English)

Unidiomatic usage of prepositions frequently involved two-word verbs.

> We should think for (i.e., consider) the youth...(Spanish)

7. *Article Usage* was another problem category for many speakers of English as a second language. The highest error counts in this category occurred with article omission and article intrusion.

> Omission: For past few years, most teachers cared more about intelligent student than slow learner. (Japanese)
>
> Intrusion: The community of the today affects the world in the international relations. (Black English)

Errors in article omission decreased over the quarter by 50%, but errors with intrusive articles did not decrease.

8. *Word Selection* errors in diction and inappropriate word choice occurred with relatively high frequency. While selection of the wrong word sometimes involved such pitfalls as affect/effect and sit/set, errors in this category more commonly indicated a need for vocabulary development.

> The author has put Mary Kitchen's hash in an appealing dish and Mom's in an unrelished pot. (Black English)
>
> He (the author) will beguile the different word meanings in order to get his point across. (Black English)

Errors in diction (slang and colloquialism) decreased over the quarter by 51%, but errors with inappropriate word choice declined by only 36%. Other categories of word selection such as wordiness and unidiomatic expression (excluding use of prepositions), showed little or no decrease in errors.

9. *Mechanical Conventions*, of all the error categories, proved to be the most difficult to master. These errors declined by less than one-third during the quarter and ultimately accounted for 30% of the total errors in all nine categories. Errors in spelling, the most frequently recurring problem during the quarter, decreased by only 1%. Punctuation errors decreased by 34%.

Whether or not students in the EOP sections passed English A was closely correlated to their success in mastering the skills of the first two general categories: *Organization and Focus* and *Sentence Structure*. Students who were unable to correct deficiencies in these categories, regardless of their progress in the other seven, did not pass English A. On the other hand, passing the course showed no direct relationship to success in the remaining seven categories. In fact, the number of students who passed English A in spite of persistent problems with *Usage* (i.e., verb, noun, pronoun, preposition, and article) and *Mechanical Conventions* indicates that such problems by themselves do not seriously limit communication in otherwise well-organized, coherent essays.

Overall, students in the EOP sections displayed a 62% average decrease in errors per page. As can be observed in Figure 10, most of this progress took place in the first three weeks of the quarter, during which 73% of the eventual decrease was realized. This unusual pattern probably reflects a combination of increased complexity in assignments, accelerated competition from other courses, and a decline in motivation. Certainly, writing assignments after the third week tended to be more challenging; and midterm exams in other courses, courses (unlike English A) in which students would receive grades, began in the fourth week of the quarter. However, the primary reason for the phenomenon was probably the observable decline in interest and motivation on the part of some of the students in the program. The attendance average for all students in the EOP sections was 81%, but certain language groups, notably Black English and Native

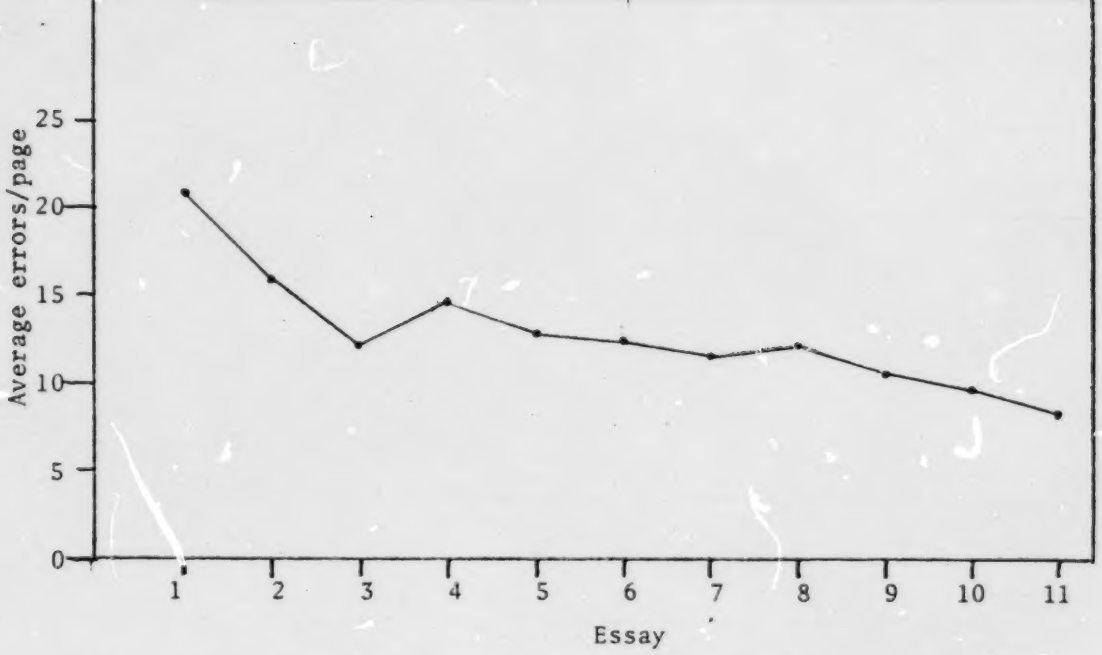

Figure 10 Overall errors for students in EOP Subject A sections.

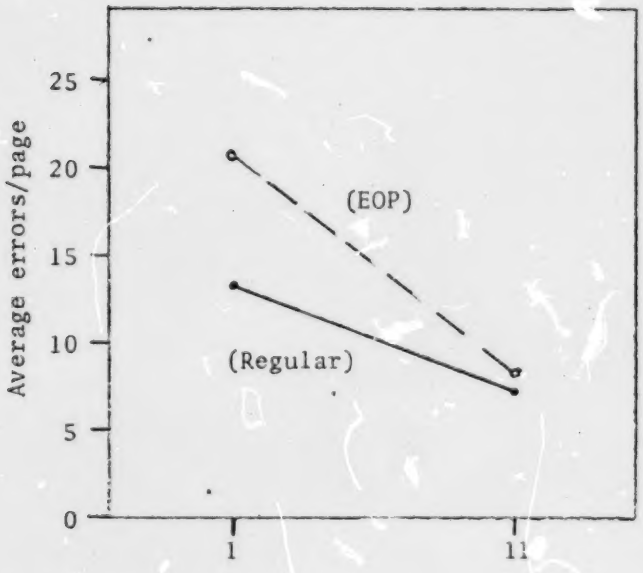

Figure 11 Overall errors for EOP and regular groups.

American, had attendance rates well below this average.[4]

B. Comparative Performances: EOP and Regular Sections

Errors: The predicted difference between the performances of the two groups, regular and EOP, was clearly present at the beginning of the quarter. The error average from the first essay was 64% higher for students in the EOP sections of English A than for students in the regular sections. During the quarter, this gap narrowed considerably, and error averages on final essays showed the two groups to be very close (See Figure 11). While both groups improved considerably, the rate of improvement for students in the EOP sections generally exceeded the rate for students in the regular sections. An overall error rate reduction of 62% was achieved by the EOP sections, while reduction by regular sections was slightly less than one-half (47%).

Table 1 contains a summary comparison of the two group averages for all nine essay categories. This information is shown graphically in Figures 12-20. Both groups made comparable rates of improvement in the categories of Organization and Focus, Sentence Structure, Noun Usage, and Article Usage. In Verb Usage and Pronoun Usage, students in the EOP sections, who needed to make much more improvement than did students in the regular sections, narrowed the initial difference by a considerable margin. In Word Selection and Mechanical Conventions, the EOP sections again achieved a greater average error decrease than did the regular sections.

Some of the specific error categories that posed the greatest resistance to improvement were the same for both groups. Final averages for errors in spelling and diction, for example, remained at initial levels. For students in the regular sections, punctuation and pronoun reference errors, initially at a fairly low level showed no change during the quarter. However, as was typical with many of the error categories, students in the

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[4]The University of New Mexico, which has an English language program with ethnic groups similar to those among EOP students at UC Davis, has adapted the Myers/Briggs test(a personality indicator) to determine potential behavior problems. This test and its successful application is described by Brodkey and Shore in Language Learning, June 1976, pp. 153-162.

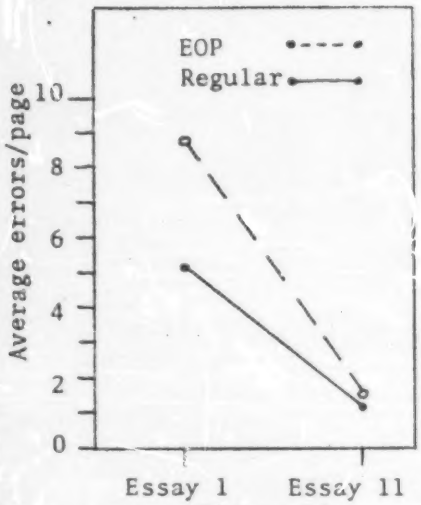

Figure 12
1. Organization and Focus

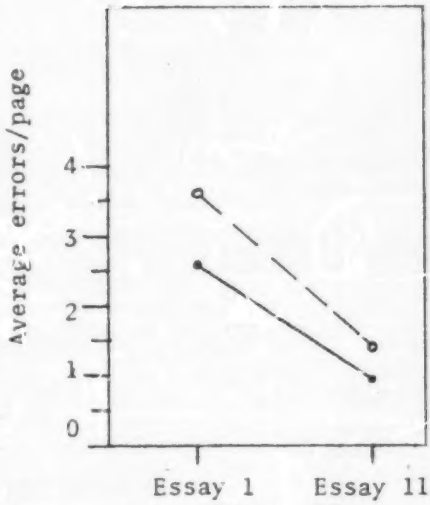

Figure 13
2. Sentence Structure

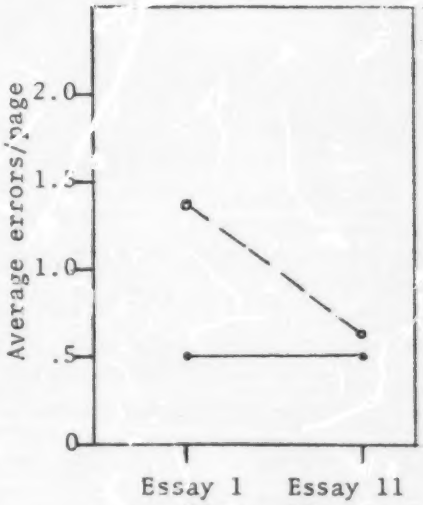

Figure 14
3. Verb Usage

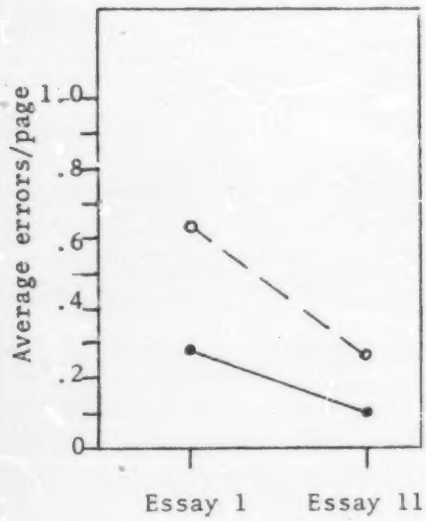

Figure 15
4. Noun Usage

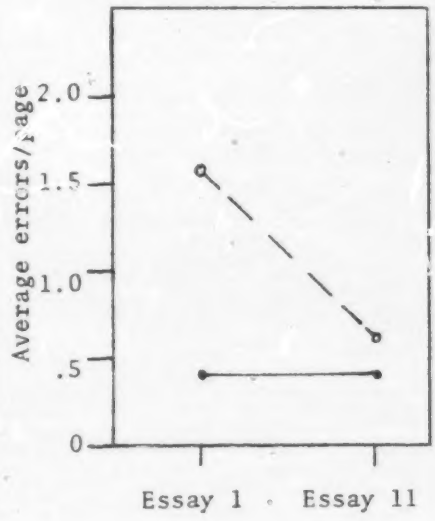

Figure 16
5. Pronoun Usage

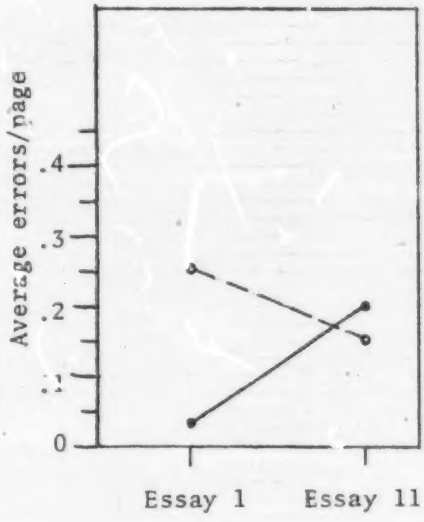

Figure 17
6. Preposition Usage

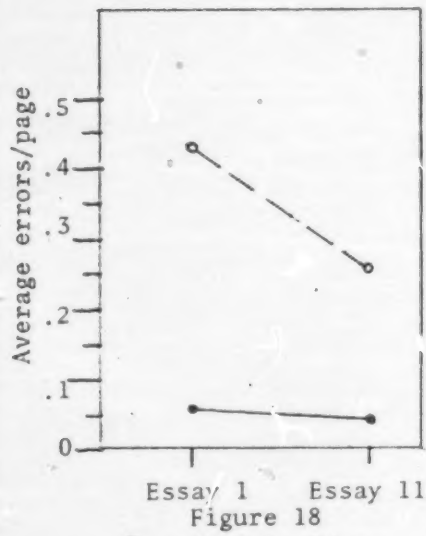

Figure 18
7. Article Usage

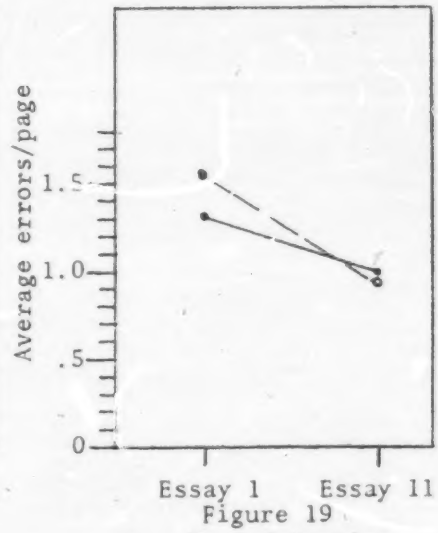

Figure 19
8. Word Selection

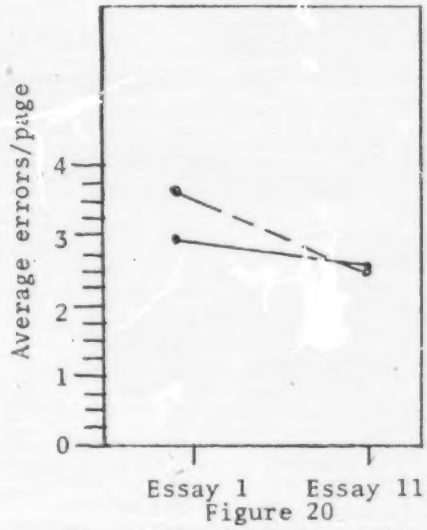

Figure 20
9. Mechanical Conventions

TABLE 1

Essay Error Categories by Group, at the Beginning (Essay #1) and End (Essay #11) of the Quarter in EOP and Regular Subject A Sections (in average errors per page per student)

ESSAY ERROR CATEGORIES	EOP Sections			Regular Sections		
	#1	#11	Decrease	#1	#11	Decrease (Increase)
1. Organization and Focus	8.81	1.54	83%	5.19	1.25	76%
2. Sentence Structure	3.64	1.43	61%	2.64	0.96	64%
3. Verb Usage	1.38	0.63	54%	0.52	0.54	(4%)
4. Noun Usage	0.63	0.26	59%	0.28	0.10	64%
5. Pronoun Usage	1.59	0.62	61%	0.42	0.41	2%
6. Preposition Usage	0.26	0.16	38%	0.03	0.20	(567%)
7. Article Usage	0.43	0.26	40%	0.06	0.04	33%
8. Word Selection	1.54	0.94	39%	1.31	1.01	23%
9. Mechanical Conventions	3.64	2.46	32%	2.91	2.57	12%
All Errors	21.92	8.30	62%	13.36	7.08	47%

EOP sections had more trouble at first with punctuation and pronoun reference, but managed to improve to almost the performance level of the students in the non-EOP sections by the end of the quarter.

Grades: For the fall quarter, 96% of the students in the regular sections of English A received a pass grade. The performance of the students in the EOP sections was nearly comparable; 90% of these students passed the course.

C. The Relationship of Writing Errors to First Language

In order to ascertain if primary language or dialect caused any consistent interference in ability to master standard English skills, contrastive error tabulations were compiled for the six language groupings used in this study: English, Black English, Chinese/Vietnamese, Latin (Spanish, Italian, Portuguese), Japanese/Korean, and Native American. A specific set of error categories was used to compare language groups. These categories were chosen because of their presumed ability to differentiate language groups based on first-language interference. Table 2 contains a detailed first-last essay comparison for these six language groups.

Students whose first language is either Japanese or Korean initially had the most problems, with the highest total error count of all six language groups (averaging 35.3 errors per student per page). In addition to the predicted difficulty with article usage, this group had the highest initial error rate in all but two of the error categories. By the end of the quarter, however, the Japanese/Korean group made the greatest improvement of all the language groups. These students achieved a 79% decrease in overall errors. While Japanese/Korean progress was the most dramatic, each of the other groups was also able to decrease its overall error rate by at least 50%: English (a 70% drop), Native American (61%), Chinese/Vietnamese (55%), and Black English and the Latin group (each, 54%).

There was evidence generally supporting predicted first-language interference. For example, as predicted, article errors occurred with relatively high frequency among speakers of Japanese and Korean, languages that do not have articles. Also as predicted, inflection errors with nouns occurred with considerably more frequency among

TABLE 2

Selected Essay Error Categories by Language Group, at the Beginning (Essay 1) and End (Essay 11) of the Quarter in Special Subject A Classes
(in average errors per page per student)

Language Group	SELECTED ESSAY ERROR CATEGORIES*								
	A Organization & Focus 1 - 11	B Sentence Structure 1 - 11	C_1 Verb Usage #1 1 - 11	C_2 Verb Usage #2 1 - 11	D Noun Usage 1 - 11	F Preposition Usage 1 - 11	G Article Usage 1 - 11	H Word Selection 1 - 11	Overall Errors 1 - 11
1. ENGLISH	8.6 - 1.1	2.6 - 1.3	0.5 - 0.1	0.1 - 0.04	0.3 - 0.1	0.1 - 0.1	0.1 - 0.1	0.9 - 0.4	18.6 - 5.5
2. BLACK ENGLISH	10.1 - 2.0	4.3 - 2.4	0.5 - 0.4	0.2 - 0.3	1.5 - 0.4	0.3 - 0.4	0.4 - 0.2	0.8 - 1.2	26.2 - 12.1
3. CHINESE - VIETNAMESE	6.8 - 0.2	2.3 - 1.1	0.7 - 0.4	0.9 - 1.2	2.0 - 1.0	0.2 - 0.2	0.2 - 0.5	1.7 - 1.2	18.1 - 8.2
4. LATIN (Spanish, Italian, Portuguese)	7.9 - 2.1	3.8 - 1.1	0.4 - 0.2	0.5 - 0.3	0.3 - 0.1	0.2 - 0.1	0.2 - 0.3	1.9 - 1.0	21.6 - 10.0
5. JAPANESE - KOREAN	13.3 - 1.6	7.1 - 1.5	1.6 - 0.0	1.1 - 0.5	1.2 - 0.4	1.2 - 0.3	3.0 - 1.3	1.0 - 0.5	35.3 - 7.4
6. NATIVE AMERICAN	8.9 - 1.4	4.3 - 1.5	0.5 - 0.0	0.0 - 0.0	0.2 - 0.4	0.0 - 0.0	0.6 - 0.4	0.3 - 1.4	22.7 - 8.9

*Selected Essay Error Categories

A	Organization & Focus	(1 - 8)
B	Sentence Structure	(9 - 13)
C_1	Verb Usage #1	(16, 23-25 -- tense, aspect, mood, and voice)
C_2	Verb Usage #2	(15, 17, and 18 -- use of inflections)
D	Noun Usage	(27 - 29 -- problems with inflections and countability of nouns)
F	Preposition Usage	(36 - 38)
G	Article Usage	(39 - 42)
H	Word Selection	(43, 44, and 47 -- diction, unidiomatic phrasing, and wrong word)
	Overall Errors	(1 - 54)

speakers of Black English and of one of the Oriental languages than among speakers of a Latin language. However, errors with articles were not totally specific to Japanese and Korean speakers; and errors with noun inflections occurred, to varying degrees, among all of the language groups. Furthermore, within each language group, students demonstrated a wide range of proficiencies in English. For example, individual students showing the greatest difficulty with sentence structure spoke either Japanese, Korean, Black English, or one of the Native American languages; but other students in these same language groups showed relatively high levels of proficiency with sentences. Therefore, there was no unique set of writing errors nor no one specific level of proficiency that conclusively isolated any one of the language groups from the others.

FINAL COMMENTS

The evaluation of student performance in the EOP sections of English A during Fall, 1976, shows encouraging results. Writing ability improved by a considerable degree, with the overall error rate of students in the EOP sections dropping 62% by the end of the quarter. This decrease is noteworthy when it is compared to the 47% decrease experienced by students in the two regular sections. Such a finding is particularly significant in view of the considerable difference between the two groups in academic and linguistic backgrounds.

Partial corroboration of the effectiveness of these EOP sections in preparing students to cope with academic writing comes from the winter, 1977, quarter statistics outlining student success in English 1. Twenty-five students who had taken English A in the EOP sections enrolled in regular sections of English 1. Sixty-eight percent (17) received a final grade of B, 24% (6) received C, one failed, and one received an incomplete.

An additional twenty-five students from the fall EOP sections of English A enrolled in four EOP sections of English 1 during winter quarter. These classes were set up to provide continued intensive instruction in expository writing, particularly for those students who just barely passed English A.

Although these students struggled with many more writing problems than did students from EOP who had enrolled in the regular sections, final grades indicated that most of them made considerable progress: one A, ten B's, nine C's, two D's, one F, and two incompletes.

As the program continues at Davis, certain aspects of the EOP sections have not changed significantly. For example, student profile remains fairly constant; and no effort as yet has been made to group students by either proficiency or first-language criteria. On the other hand, some of the problems in the earlier stages of the program seem to have been resolved. Most notably, erratic attendance rates now occur only rarely. Partially responsible for this improvement is the fact that English A, since Fall, 1977, offers units with a grade; but in addition to this incentive, instructors of EOP sections now specify attendance as part of the course requirement. Probably related to this increase in class attendance is an observable improvement in student writing relative to some of the error categories that earlier showed little or no improvement during the period of a quarter. In short, most of the students appear now to be available in class to receive the extra help they need with the stubborn problems of punctuation and usage.

While it is clear that many students in the EOP sections make significant progress, inadequacies in the research design limit a precise understanding of why the program succeeds. A primary assumption underlying the development of the special English A sections was that small class size was necessary so that instructors would have sufficient time to provide the amount of individualized attention and support needed by these students. Unfortunately, because the EOP sections were compared in the 1976 study with an inadequate set of control groups, one cannot unequivocally state that the improvements are the direct result of small class size.

There are at least two alternative explanations for what is taking place. It seems plausible that the grouping of students in EOP together may be a major reason for the decline in error rates. By creating EOP sections, department administrators may make it easier for teachers to tailor their particular instructional focus to the specific needs of these students; and, as a result, this more narrowly defined focus may make the difference in student performance. This factor may very well be independent of the number of students in the class. A second possible explanation is that these students might possibly respond to any form of competent instruction, regardless of

class size or group constituency. It should be noted, however, that a small number of students from EOP remained in regular sections of English A during the fall quarter study and failed to pass the course. One of these students, who later repeated the course in an EOP section, expressed certain criticisms of the regular section relative to her own needs: a) not enough writing assignments, b) too many students in class, c) insufficient out-of-class assistance from teacher, and d) writing assignments too unstructured (i.e., the student often did not understand the assignments and felt uncomfortable asking questions). The student further commented that the teacher in the EOP section "...had time to help me with my specific needs (especially with some of my problems with English as a second language),... explained concepts clearly, ...gave helpful and frequent writing assignments..." Statements of other students in the EOP sections, taken from course evaluation questionnaires,[5] support this student's assessment of the small classes:

> I like it very much...I am working on my major weaknesses.
>
> I have more confidence in a small group.
>
> I like small groups...we can exchange ideas and compare papers.
>
> As the class I am enrolled in is small, I am getting more help and explanations.
>
> I really need the help this class is giving me.
>
> I'm very fortunate to be in such a class as this because I feel I can get better help in improving my English.
>
> The teacher knows her material and is interested in her students.
>
> We are not just a number.

Such comments appear to indicate that small class size, permitting individualized classroom instruction and frequent personal conferences with instructors, may indeed be strongly related to the success of the program in Davis.

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[5] During the fall quarter study, students in the program were asked to complete an attitude questionnaire at the beginning of the quarter and a course evaluation at the end of the quarter. A generally negative response was anticipated because on the first day of class, students, for reasons not clear to them, were transferred from regular sections of English A to small EOP sections. This unexpected transfer necessitated the inconvenience of rearranging schedules and of filing drop and add cards. However, ninety-one percent of the students expressed positive reactions.

Appendix A

LINGUISTIC ERRATA FORM CATEGORIES

A. Organization and Focus (1-8)

B. Sentence Structure (9-13)

C. Verb Usage (14-25)

D. Noun Usage (26-29)

E. Pronoun Usage (30-35)

F. Preposition Usage (36-38)

G. Article Usage (39-42)

H. Word Selection (43-48)

I. Mechanical Conventions (49-54)

Linguistic Errata Form

Section:
First language/dialect:
Grade:

| | | |

E. Pronoun Usage

30 ref
31 appos
32 intrusive
33 omit
34 pers
35 case

F. Preposition Usage

36 unidiom
37 intrusive
38 omit

G. Article Usage

39 omit
40 intrusive
41 def/indef
42 a/an

* Adjective/Adverb

* Affixing

H. Word Selection

43 Diction
44 Unidiomatic phrasing
45 Repetitious
46 Trite
47 Wrong word
48 Wordy

I. Mechanical Conventions

49 Punctuation
50 Spelling
51 Capitalization
52 Abbreviation
53 Contraction
54 Numbers

Beryl Duffin, 1976

* excluded from analysis